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THE
COMMERCIAL FUTURE
OF BAGHDAD

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THE proclamation of General Sir Stanley Maude, the victor of Baghdad, to the people of that ancient city of the East is certain to make a profound impression. He points out to the Arabs that the British troops have come, not as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators, who will help the people to restore their land, so long made desolate by their oppressors, the Turks, to something like its old-time prosperity and splendour.

An important statement on the future of Mesopotamia and the splendid trade prospect that has now opened out before, not only the people of that land, but the merchants of the world, has been made by Lieut.-Col. Sir Mark Sykes, a member of the British House of Commons, who has devoted much study to racial and political problems of the Near East.

He is convinced that with the removal of the paralysing hand of the Turk, who has for so long kept a strangle-hold on the development of the fertile land and its peoples, will come a great and steady improvement in its fortunes.

"All the merchants in the world will profit," said Sir Mark. "It will mean eventually putting down something like a new Hamburg in the world. Money will be made there, and the Arab, if the past is any criterion, will acquire European tastes, and will want to buy things.

"If the Arab in the fourth century liked Corinthian columns so much that he built them in the desert, there is every reason to believe that he will have similar ambitions again, now that he is to be a free man, able to respond to the high intellectual impulses which have always been a characteristic of his race.

"Baghdad depends for its prosperity upon two factors—its position as a junction of main routes, and its central situation in a very rich agricultural area. It has a double advantage as a junction of routes, because it is a place where the rivers Euphrates and Tigris come very close to one another, two big rivers which, even under the primitive conditions of the present time, carry an enormous amount of current-borne traffic, by means of rafts on the Tigris, and barges and rafts on the Euphrates.

"On the Euphrates comes the water-borne transport from Aleppo down to within thirty miles of Baghdad.

"On the Tigris comes the water-borne transport of Diarbekir. Baghdad has the only caravan route from Central Persia, and as the Tigris is fully navigable from Basra, Baghdad is almost

a seaport, an important point when one considers that goods come cheaper by water than by rail.

"With the development of river traffic, it will be cheaper to send goods to Mosul via Baghdad than from the Mediterranean.

"Then, of course, there is the enormously important factor of the Baghdad Railway. Primarily intended to be built for commerce, it has, in the hands of the Germans, become strategic, with a view to menacing India.

"Mindful of the British Fleet, they kept as far away from its influence as possible. They could not avoid going near it at Alexandretta, but beyond that place, instead of going the natural way along the Euphrates valley, they went round by Mosul.

"It is a railway which will build itself. It will be in easy communication with the Mediterranean, and we may witness a return of what was the overland route of the Middle Ages, a route which died out when Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape, a discovery almost as fatal to Middle Eastern culture as the destruction of Baghdad by the Turanian hordes.

"Railway construction across the Syrian desert will be so easy that probably Damascus will be connected with the Euphrates. There could be an open road across the flat desert for motor-cars, and there is plenty of water if only it can be stored. All over that desert you see remains of ancient dams, and there is no reason why it

should not have considerable reservoirs as it had in the past.

"The development of Baghdad has been checked by the bad sanitary conditions, causing frightful outbreaks of cholera, and by the artificial restrictions imposed by the Turks. For the last forty years practically such of the male population as could not pay exemption were carried off for long terms of service with the colours. Fifteen per cent. never survived the life in the pestilential barracks, and the rest returned broken men.

"An English medical missionary at Mosul told me that if he could have charge of the sanitation of the place the population would be doubled in fifteen years, because there is such a high birth-rate.

"Remove the restrictions, and the population of Baghdad, which was about 140,000 before the war, and practically a commercial population, would be doubled also.

"Government, as a rule, is a plus quantity, but Turkish Government is always a minus quantity. During the last years of the eighteenth century in Northern Mesopotamia, when the country was in a condition of anarchy, tempered by feudalism, the population was more than it is now.

"An increasing population in the near future means that more labour will be available for irrigation works. One does not want to raise false hopes—but there is no doubt that the land

is the richest in the world. The water-supply is there, but there is need for great organization. You can cultivate as fast as you can irrigate, and irrigate as fast as you can get labour.

"The people will go there gradually, but we must not imagine that, ten years after the awakening, Mesopotamia will have become as great as it was a thousand years ago. It will take much longer than that, if it ever does reach to such affluence again.

"It should be remembered that the Arabs are just as susceptible to the influence of education as any people in the world, and that is an enormous factor.

"Mesopotamia has always been a centre of intellectual life, and I will say this for the Turks, that with all their vices they did a very great deal, especially under Abdul Hamid, for education. It was part of their plan of Turkeyfying the people.

"Those who were trained in the Government schools are capable of holding their own with the educated of any other country. There is no reason why Baghdad and other centres should not turn out just as good men in the professions and in commerce as the European countries.

"People were studying Plato in Baghdad in the eighth century.

"Turkey is the only nation which has not been a source of profit to the Arab, and that is because the Turk only looks for conquest. The intel-

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lectual marriage of the Arab with the Turk is the only union the Arab has made which has been sterile.

"Now the Arab is once more coming into contact with European civilization, it will be as well to bear in mind that he is a Semite, with all the intelligence and resource of that race.

"There are rich oilfields near by, and the 'Black Country' of Mesopotamia may rise here, and the demands on European manufacturers for machinery and other things should be enormous."